

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 EB-07 TRSE-00 COME-00 LAB-04
SIL-01 EUR-12 DLOS-09 INT-05 OES-07 IO-13 /119 W
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6722
INFO AMEMBASSY VICTORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0545

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PFOR PGOV ECON EFIN ELAB UR MP
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW- MAY 20, 1977

REF: PORT LOUIS 519

SUMMARY: PORT LOUIS 544 PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF THIS CABLE. END
SUMMARY.

1. BOLD, BLACK HEADLINES STRETCHED ACROSS THE FRONT PAGES OF MOST PAPERS ON SATURDAY, MAY 16, ANNOUNCING THAT SURESH MOORBA, MMM DEPUTY WHO HAD QUIT HIS PARTY'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE A FEWS DAYS EARLIER (REFTEL), HAD RESINGED FROM THE PARTY ENTIRELY. IN A SERIES OF PRESS INTERVIEWS, MOORBA RELEASED A STRING OF EPITHETS AT THE MMM, INCLUDING THE CHARGE THAT SECREATRY GENERAL BERENGER WAS A "DICTATOR."

THOUGH MOORBA DID NOT SAY WHETHER HE WOULD JOIN THE LABOR/PMSD COALITION GOVERNMENT OR REMAIN INDEPENDENT, HIS DEPARTURE REPRESENTED THE FIRST VOTE LOSS OF EITHER SIDE IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SINCE LAST DECEMBER'S ELECTIONS.

2. MOORBA SAID HE WAS BITTER OVER HIS DEFEAT IN THE MINICIPAL ELECTIONS. HE BLAMED MMM SABOTAGE. HE CLAIMED HE WAS FORCED TO
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RUN IN A DIFFICULT DISTRICT DIFFERENT FROM THE ONE WHERE HE WON HIS ASSEMBLY SEAT IN DECEMBER. IN AN INTERVIEW WITH LE MAURICIEN MOORBA STATED: "IT WAS SAID IN THE (MMM) CENTRAL COMMITTEE THAT ANYONE WHO 'JUMPS' THE PARTY SHOULD FEAR FOR HIS LIFE. I AM READY TO DO IT (JUMP) IF NECESSARY IN A FEW DAYS. IF THERE ARE ACTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST ME, WHETHER THEY COME FROM A TOWN, A VILLAGE OR A SECITION OF THE POPULATION, THOSE GUILTY OF THAT WILL BE RESPONSIBLE

FOR CREATING VIOLENCE IN THE COUNTRY." MOORBA SAID ABOUT BERENGER:
"I BELIEVE BERENGER IS SURROUNDED BY A PACK OF WOLVES WHO WILL
FINISH BE DEVOURING THE PARTY. HE DOESN'T REPRESENT MUCH ANY MORE,
GIVEN THAT HIS PARTY HAS DEVIATED. THE PARTY HAS BEEN 'BOURGEOISIZED'
SINCE 1970 AND THAT WILL NOT ONLY SUFFOCATE THE PARTY BUT IN THE
END WILL KILL IT."

3. A SECOND RESIGNATION FROM THE MMM SEEMED IMMINENT WHEN MMM
DEPUTY HARRIS RAMPHUL EXPRESSED BITTER DISSATISFACTION OVER THE HIGH-
HANDED WAY IN WHICH THE PARTY'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE WAS CHOSEN
(PORT LOUIS 289). IN THE FACE OF RAMPHUL'S THREAT TO QUIT,
BERENGER AND OTHER PARTY LEADERS APPARENTLY TALKED TO HIM AND OTHERS
WHO HAD GRIEVANCES, AND PROMISED TO RE-EXAMINE THE STRUCTURE OF THE
MMM PARTY ORGANIZATION, FROM THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE DOWNWARD. IN FACT,
THE SHOCK OF THE MOORBA DEFECTION HAS ALREADY SET OFF A "PROFOUND
REDISTRIBUTION" OF PARTY RESPONSIBILITIES, ACCORDING TO THE MMM'S
NEWSPAPER. THE MMM HAS SCHEDULED A MEETING OF DELEGATES ON MAY 29
TO CONSIDER IMPORTANT DECISIONS, AND WILL POSSIBLY EVEN ELECT A NEW
CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

4. ANOTHER DISCONTENTED MMM CADRE RESIGNED FROM THE PARTY LATER IN
THE WEEK. HE IS SURESH BENNYERSAD, A MILITANT SINCE 1969 259 2-
8.048 9,3\$ 285# 95#34 ...)3-\$ERS AFTER THE GENERAL STRIKE OF
1971. AN OFFICIAL OF THE GENERAL WORKERS FEDERATION AND THE
MMM CENTRAL WATER AUTHORITY AND CIVIL SERVICE UNIONS, HE
RESIGNED THESE POSTS AS WELL. HE COMPLAINED OF "DICTATORSHIP,
COMMUNALISM, RULE BY A CLIQUE, HYPOCRISY AND A BOURGEOIS MENTALITY"
UNDER THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP OF THE MMM.

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5. PMSD LEADER GAETAN DUVAL, POSSIBLY TO ADD MORE FUEL TO THE
SMOLDERING RUMORS THAT OTHER DEFECTIONS ARE IN THE OFFING,
ANNOUNCED TO THE PRESS ON MAY 17 THAT TWO MMM MEMBERS WOULD SOON
JOIN THE PMSD, AND THAT HE WOULD REVEAL THE NAMES LATER IN THE WEEK.

6. PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM REVEALED ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND
TO THE MMM DEFECTION STORIES BY STATING DURING THE WEEKEND
REGIONAL LABOR PARTY CONGRESS IN THE SOUTH (REFTEL) THAT SEVERAL
MMM DEPUTIES HAD APPROACHED HIM FOLLOWING THE DECEMBER ELECTIONS
TO REQUEST ACCEPTANCE INTO THE LABOR PARTY. RAM SAID HE COUNSELLED
THEM AT THE TIME "TO WAIT AWHILE."

7. THE LABOR PARTY CONGRESS HELD IN THE SOUTH (MAY 14-15) TO OBTAIN
"THE OPINIONS OF THE PEOPLE" (REFTEL), WAS LABELLED A SUCCESS BY
ITS ORGANIZERS THOUGH THERE APPEARED TO BE MUCH MORE PREACHING TO
THE PEOPLE THAN LISTENING TO THEIR OPINIONS. A DOZEN PARTY LEADERS
TOOK TO THE ROSTRUM AND FOR THE MOST PART ASSAILED THE MMM. MINISTER
OF EDUCATION KHER JAGATSINGH, HOWEVER, CRITICIZED LABORITES FOR
CONCENTRATING ON "CASTE AND COMMUNULIST" ISSUES LAST DECEMBER,

WHICH HAD CAUSED THE PARTY TO DO BADLY IN THE ELECTIONS. GAETAN DUVAL, PMSD LEADER, ALSO ADDRESSED THE CONGRESS, SPARKING SPECULATION THAT HE WILL RUN FOR PARLIAMENT IF BY-ELECTIONS ARE RESTORED.

8. RESPONDING TO THE ATTACKS OF THE MMM ON HIS PROPOSED BUDGET, FINANCE MINISTER RINGADOO SAID IN THE ASSEMBLY THAT IT IS NOT AN "AUSTERITY" BUDGET BUT ONE OF "SELF-RESTRAINT." HE AGAIN DENIED THAT THE COUNTRY FACES AN ECONOMIC CRISIS, AND ACCUSED THE OPPOSITION OF EXAGGERATING THE SITUATION. HE SAID THE MMM CLAIMED IT WANTED TO PLACE THE ECONOMY IN THE HANDS OF THE MASSES BUT WHAT WOULD REALLY HAPPEN WOULD BE TO PLACE IT IN THE HANDS OF ONE MAN (BERENGER) AND HIS POLITBURO.

9. IN THE ASSEMBLY THE OPPOSITION MMM HAS STRONGLY CRITICIZED THE QUALITY AND OBJECTIVITY OF MBC-TV PROGRAMMING. THEY ALSO ATTACKED THE BRITISH EXPERT ATTACHED TO THE INFORMATION MINISTRY
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FOR ACTING AS A CENSOR. LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION JUGNAUTH ALSO CALLED FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF BRITISH SECURITY ADVISER REWCASTLE BY A MAURITIAN. THE MMM STRONGLY SUPPORTED SUBSIDIES FOR ALL THE RELIGIONS OF MAURITIUS AND EVEN CALLED FOR AN INCREASE IN THIS BUDGET ITEM.

10. MINISTER OF HOUSING ELIEZER FRANCOIS, A FORMER LABOR UNION LEADER, CALLED FOR A REFERENDUM AMONG ALL WORKERS TO PERMIT THEM TO DECIDE WHETHER THEY WANT TO ABOLISH THE OBLIGATORY UNION DUES PAYMENTS. INTRODUCED BY THE MINISTER OF LABOR SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, THE MEASURE HAS BEEN WIDELY OPPOSED BY ALMOST ALL UNION LEADERS THE MEASURE'S SUPPORTERS BELIEVE THAT MOST WORKERS FAVOR ITS ABOLITION. BUT EVEN MORE IMPORTANT TO ITS ADVOCATES IS THAT THE BILL WOULD REDUCE DRASTICALLY THE LARGEST AND STEADIEST SOURCE OF INCOME TO THE UNIONS, MANY OF WHICH ARE MMM CONTROLLED.

11. IN ANSWER TO A PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION RAMGOOLAM SAID A REFERENDUM ON THE QUESTION OF MAKING MAURITIUS A REPUBLIC WILL BE HELD THIS YEAR (AS PROMISED IN THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE IN JANUARY).

12. ON HIS RETURN FROM ATTENDING SUGAR TALKS IN EUROPE, AGRICULTURE MINISTER BOOLELL SAID HE WAS SATISFIED WITH THE PRICE OBTAINED FROM THE EEC, WHICH REPRESENTS ABOUT A 4 PERCENT INCREASE OVER THE PRICE FOR 1976. HE SAID THE NEGOTIATIONS WERE LONG AND DIFFICULT. BOOLELL REMAINS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE CHANCES OF ACHIEVING A NEW INTERNATIONAL SUGAR AGREEMENT, AND SAID ONE OF THE FAVORABLE DEVELOPMENTS IS THAT THE U.S. AND THE EEC FAVOR HAVING ONE.

13. THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX (CPI) ROSE AGAIN DURING MARCH.

ACCORDING TO THE OFFICIAL ECONOMIC INDEXING DATA, THE CPI WENT UP BY .8 PERCENT. THOUGH THE TREND IS STILL UPWARD, THE RATE OF INCREASE HAS SLOWED IN THAT FEBRUARY'S RISE WAS 1.9 PERCENT. (SEE PORT LOUIS A-23, APRIL 1, 1977.)

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14. IN THE AREA OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, L'EXPRESS PUBLISHED A REPORT ON MAY 17, CLEARLY BASED ON A GOVERNMENT BACKGROUNDER, THAT RAMGOOLAM HAS DECIDED NOT TO RENEW THE 1970 FISHING AGREEMENT WITH THE USSR WHICH EXPIRED AT THE END OF LAST YEAR. RENEWED TWICE PREVIOUSLY, THE ACCORD GAVE THE SOVIETS CERTAIN PORT FACILITIES FOR THEIR FISHING FLEET, IN RETURN FOR WHICH THE USSR WAS TO HELP DEVELOP THE MAURITIAN FISHING INDUSTRY. THE REPORT SAID THE DECISION AGAINST RENEWAL WAS CAUSED BY THE FAILURE OF THE SOVIETS TO RECIPROCATATE AND ALSO BECAUSE OF CERTAIN ACTIVITIES BY THE SOVIETS WHICH THE GOM CONSIDERS CONTRARY TO THE NATIONAL INTEREST. THE PAPER SAID THE DECISION WAS TAKEN PERSONALLY BY RAMGOOLAM. THE EXPRESS PIECE HINTED THAT THE VISITING SOVIET SHIPS HAD BEEN DRAWING MORE LOCAL CURRENCY THAN THEY REALLY NEEDED, WITH THE IMPLICATION THAT THIS CASH WAS BEING USED FOR ACTIVITIES NOT APPROVED BY THE GOM. COMMENT: THE SOVIETS WILL SEE THIS AS A BLOW, AS THIS FISHING AGREEMENT WAS ONE OF THEIR FEW IMPORTANT LINKS WITH THE GOM. RAMGOOLAM DECIDED TO END THE ARRANGEMENT MOST PROBABLY BECAUSE HE SAW NO BENEFITS REACHING MAURITIUS FROM IT. END COMMENT. (SEE PORT LOUIS A-32 FOR DETAILS.)
KEELEY

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Message Attributes

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